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## FOREIGN POLITICS IN AN OLD PLAY

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It is natural that an Elizabethan play on Richard III should conclude with praise of the House of Tudor for bringing civil war to an end and establishing a legitimate royal line. Such is the epilogue of Legge's *Richardus Tertius* and such are the closing speeches of the *True Tragedy of Richard the Third*. In the English play, however, to the general eulogy of Elizabeth there have been added certain allusions to specific contemporary events, which are not unworthy of notice.

The last speech in the *True Tragedy* is as follows:

Worthy Elizabeth, a mirror in her age, by whose wise life, and civil government, her country was defended from the cruelty of famine, fire and sword, war's fearful messengers.

This is the Queen as writers truly say,  
That God had marked down to live for aye.  
Then happy England mongst thy neighbor isles,  
For peace and plenty still attends on thee:  
And all the favorable Planets smiles  
To see thee live in such prosperity.  
She is the lamp that keeps fair England's light,  
And through her faith her country lives in peace:  
And she hath put proud Antichrist to flight,  
And been the means that civil wars did cease.  
Then England kneel upon thy hairy knee,  
And thank that God that still provides for thee.  
The Turk admires to hear her government,  
And babies in *Jewry* sound her princely name,  
All Christian Princes to that Prince hath sent,  
After her rule was rumored forth by fame.  
The Turk hath sworn never to lift his hand,  
To wrong the Princess of this blessed land.  
'Twere vain to tell the care this Queen hath had,  
In helping those that were opprest by war:  
And how her Majesty hath still been glad,  
When she hath heard of peace proclaim'd from far.  
*Geneva, France, and Flanders* hath set down,

The good she hath done, since she came to the crown,  
 For which, if e'er her life be ta'en away,  
 God grant her soul may live in heaven for aye.  
 For if her Grace's days be brought to end,  
 Your hope is gone, on whom did peace depend.<sup>1</sup>

This passage was obviously written to be spoken before Elizabeth. The date must lie between the performance of December 26, 1591, after which the Queen's men, to whom the piece belonged, ceased for three years to act at court, and December 26, 1588, their first performance after the defeat of the Spanish Armada, an event indicated in the line, "She hath put proud Antichrist to flight," while the public religious observances officially proclaimed throughout the land in November are alluded to in the couplet that follows: "Then England kneel upon thy hairy knee, etc."<sup>2</sup> The congratulations sent to Elizabeth after her victory seem to be the subject-matter of the lines

All Christian Princes to that Prince hath sent,  
 After her rule was rumored forth by fame.

Giovanni Mocenigo, Venetian ambassador in France, writing to the Senate, December 20, 1588, says: "Her reputation with all the northern powers stands so high that there is no fear of her lacking forces sufficient to further her designs against Spain."<sup>3</sup> The coincidence is striking, for anyone familiar with the documents of the time will be aware that "Christian Princes" means "Protestant Princes." Only four of these congratulatory messages are preserved by Rymer,<sup>4</sup> two being as late as 1590, but they must have been numerous.<sup>5</sup>

The predominance of other matters over this great victory, however, makes it highly improbable that the passage under

<sup>1</sup> Furness, *Variorum Shakespeare*, "Richard III," p. 548. Here, and in all quotations, the old spelling is not retained.

<sup>2</sup> On November 3 there was an order of Council to both Canterbury and York for public and general thanks for the overthrow of the Spaniards. *Acts of Privy Council*, XVI, 334.

<sup>3</sup> *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian*, 1588, p. 419.

<sup>4</sup> Rymer, *Foedera*, XVI, 18, 20, 34, 56.

<sup>5</sup> Harborne brought some from Germany. Hakluyt, VI, 58-59.

consideration belongs to the Armada year. Sufficient time must have elapsed for the first enthusiasm to lose some of its flame. Other considerations, moreover, confirm this judgment; for, while most of the matters alluded to in the speech might individually be assigned to various years, they point in combination to the close of 1589; and the Queen's men played at court on December 26 of that year.

Probably the most prominent feature of the praise of Elizabeth contained in the speech is its insistence on the friendly relations of England and Turkey. Harborne, the English ambassador at Constantinople, returning through Poland and Germany, had reached London in December, 1588. By the use of every sort of diplomatic expedient, he had overcome the active opposition of France and Venice, and raised the prestige of Elizabeth at the Porte to the highest point.<sup>1</sup> At first his difficulties were enormous. Birch says under the year 1583,

The Grand Signior did until of late think that her majesty was but a princess subject to or depending upon the French; but being now sufficiently made acquainted with her greatness both by sea and land . . . hath therefore granted very large privileges and freedoms unto her majesty's subjects, greater than unto the French; hath written more lowly and friendly to her than to any other prince.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, while Harborne had to employ all his ingenuity at first to keep himself from being expelled at the instance of France and Venice, his successor, Barton, was able on August 4, 1590, to get the French ambassador dismissed and to have French affairs for a time put in his own hands. Although the first privileges for English merchants had been obtained in 1579 and there had been thereafter a considerable correspondence between the Porte and the Queen, the turning-point for the English ambassador was 1586, when Elizabeth accepted the protectorate of Flanders, this act being represented to the Turks by Harborne as the seizure by his mistress from the king of Spain of two of his richest provinces.<sup>3</sup> A number of agreements in favor of England were made by the Turks, and various letters were dispatched to Elizabeth. One of these

<sup>1</sup> See various entries in the *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian*, 1581-91.

<sup>2</sup> *Memoirs of the Reign of Elizabeth*, I, 56.

<sup>3</sup> *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian*, 1581-91, document 330.

that seems particularly to fit the present situation was addressed to her by Armurath III on September 15, 1589.<sup>1</sup> It begins:

Most Honorable Matron of the Christian Religion, Mirror of Chastity, adorned with the Brightness of Sovereignty and Power amongst the most chaste Women of the People which serve Jesus, Mistress of Great Kingdoms, reputed of Greatest Majesty and Praise among the Nazarites, Elizabeth Queen of England, to whom we wish a most happy and prosperous reign.

And it concludes,

Wherefore, if you shall sincerely and purely continue the bond of Amity and Friendship with our high Court, you shall find no more secure Refuge or safer Harbor of good Will or Love.

This letter, of course, the writer of the play may or may not have seen. What he unquestionably had before him was the first edition of Hakluyt's *Voyages*, published by Christopher Barker, printer to the Queen's most excellent Majesty, in 1589, the dedicatory letter to Walsingham being dated November 19, and the latest matter included in the volume being a letter from Bristol of September 10. Of the three parts into which the work is divided, the first treats of the Orient, and documents 16-35 deal with contemporary affairs in the Turkish dominions. Here is the letter sent from the Imperial Musselmanlike Highness, Zuldán Murad Chan, to the sacred regal Majesty of Elizabeth, Queen of England, March 15, 1579, and her answer of October 25; here is the Turkish charter of privileges to the English, of June, 1580, in which we read, "We have contracted an inviolable amity, peace and league with the aforesaid Queen"; here are many pages of passports, diplomatic correspondence, commissions, and reports, such as are found in neither of the other two divisions of the book, and therefore attracted the eye of the playwright as matter redounding to the Queen's credit.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Hakluyt himself had emphasized this point in the "Epistle Dedicatory," with the query, "Who ever saw before this regiment an English Ligier in the stately porch of the Grand Signor at Constantinople?" Here, then, we find the prime cause of our playwright's insistence upon the friendship of the Turk as one of the glories of Elizabeth.

<sup>1</sup> Richard Knolles, *The Turkish History* (1687) I, 708.

<sup>2</sup> The most important of these documents, but not all of them, are published in the second edition. Naturally there are also many additional pieces.

After the summer of 1590 there could hardly have failed to be reference to the celebrated letter of Eder Bassia (June 26) in which Elizabeth is told that the sultan, although he had rejected the king of Poland's appeal for peace, had at the intercession of the Queen reconsidered the matter, and for her sake "exhibited this so singular a favor unto the said king and kingdom of Poland." The incident was notorious at the time; it is reported by the Venetian ambassador, also by Camden and others, and the letter was published in the second edition of Hakluyt.<sup>1</sup> By 1593 Elizabeth feels it necessary to refute accusations of alliance with the Turks against Christians, excuses echoed by Hakluyt in 1599.<sup>2</sup>

Diligent search has failed to connect the "babies in Jewry" with any specific act of Elizabeth. The phrase seems to be a vague expression for the grandeur of the Queen, based perhaps on the claim of Murad in his charter to the English merchants that he is "Emperor of the most glorious and blessed Jerusalem." This explanation is suggested by the juxtaposition of the phrases:

The Turk admires to hear her government,  
And babies in Jewry sound her princely name.

Next to the Turk, the most pervasive notion in the speech is its insistence on peace, four times repeated. The peace that follows civil war is a natural enough thought at the close of a play on this subject; even *Richardus Tertius* ends with a song in honor of the Queen as uniting the Houses of Lancaster and York. But in the present passage it is not only domestic peace which is celebrated, but that "proclaimed from far." There is plainly a political import not found in the Latin play. The conflict between the peace party and the war party at Elizabeth's court is well known, and also the Queen's usual desire to avoid costly foreign complications. At the close of the year 1589 she was especially so disposed. The unfortunate expedition to Portugal of the preceding summer, "the greatest privateering enterprise" of modern times, had filled her with wrath. She had lost her large investment in this joint-stock enterprise, besides men and supplies. Burleigh's temporizing

<sup>1</sup> See Rymer, XVI, 74; *Calendar of State Papers, Venetian*, 1581-91, p. 494; Hakluyt, VI, 69; Camden, p. 441.

<sup>2</sup> Camden, p. 473; Hakluyt, I, lxx-lxx.

policy was in the ascendant. There is, indeed, no other period between 1588 and 1591 in which we find this same condition, for on January 2, 1590, letters were sent to the Lords Lieutenants of all the counties, to put musters in readiness in anticipation of a Spanish invasion in the spring or summer,<sup>1</sup> and on March 15 the Lord Treasurer issued "a great plan for the muster and mobilization of troops all over England."<sup>2</sup>

Elizabeth's help to those oppressed by war is too indefinite for any bearing on date, and the good done to Flanders was too frequently "set down" to afford any fixed point. The same is true of Geneva, "the nursery of the reformed religion," for whose aid money collections began early in the eighties and continued at least as late as 1602; for which assistance numerous letters of thanks were received.<sup>3</sup> One such letter, acknowledging the Queen's frequent, great and liberal beneficence," was indeed sent by the Syndics August 23, 1589, but it cannot in itself be considered a basis for fixing a date for the play.

Though Geneva and Flanders thus furnish only vague indications, France is more specific. Any such recognition of English help must have been subsequent to the death of Henry III, August 2, 1589. To Henry of Navarre, who thereupon became king, Elizabeth sent money and supplies. On September 9 the Privy Council was preparing assistance for the French king, and a levy of 4,000 men was ordered. Thereafter at every meeting during the month and sporadically during the remainder of the year, the Council was largely occupied with this expedition to France.<sup>4</sup> Stow (1589) complains of ingratitude: "Neither doth any French chronicler truly express or acknowledge the Queen of England's especial favors, manifold great expenses of money, and waste of her people, directly employed in this needful service, although the king with his own mouth hath divers times acknowledged it."<sup>5</sup> The king's thanks,

<sup>1</sup> *Acts of Privy Council*, XVIII, 294-97.

<sup>2</sup> Hume, *The Great Lord Burghley*, p. 444.

<sup>3</sup> Many of these are to be found in the *Calendars of State Papers*; see also Strype's *Annals*, Vol. III.

<sup>4</sup> *Acts of the Privy Council*, XVIII, 86 ff.

<sup>5</sup> *Annals*, p. 757.

indeed, were expressed to Elizabeth in letters written, one by Peregrine Willoughby, commander of the expedition, October 2, 1589, another by D'Aumont, October 21, still another signed Henri de Bourbon, and finally one by the king as king, neither of these last being dated, though belonging to 1589.<sup>1</sup> On January 2, 1590, preparations were made for the recall of the army under Lord Willoughby,<sup>2</sup> and in February began the recriminations between Henry and Elizabeth which put the Queen into an angry mood. In this case, again, the end of 1589 is indicated.

The records show that the Queen's men acted at court December 26, 1589.<sup>3</sup> Was not the *True Tragedy of Richard III* the play then performed? While, as we have seen, no one incident referred to in the final speech is really sufficient to date the piece, the combined evidence, particularly that derived from the allusions to Turkey and France, points directly to that performance. Of far greater interest than the exact date, however, is the amount of political information possessed by the author. The person who penned that final speech was either especially familiar with foreign affairs, or he had been exceedingly well coached.

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<sup>1</sup> Rymer, *Foedera*, XVI, 26-29.

<sup>2</sup> *Acts of Privy Council*, XVIII, 291-94.

<sup>3</sup> Greg, *Henslowe's Diary*, II, 336. Their next performance was March 1, 1590.